

## Women and Civilian Public Service

The bimonthly newsletter Women's Concern's Report first appeared in 1973. But a generation earlier, during World War II, the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) headquarters at Akron, Pa., and Kitchener, Ont., published newsletters for women that focused on overseas war relief efforts and conscientious objection. At that time, North American Mennonites and others with peace convictions faced massive war mobilization and, in some cases, significant cultural hostility because they were pacifists. In December 1943, editor Lydia Steiner, an American Mennonite, introduced to readers the Women's Relief Activities Letter:

*Dear Sisters,  
Women representing various groups of Mennonites have felt for some time the need of a medium through which matters of common interest could be brought together. The*

*Mennonite Central Committee, recognizing this need, decided to publish periodically, for the present at least, this letter.*

During the war, this four-page publication linked American Mennonite and Brethren in Christ women from across geographical regions and church conferences. It publicized the need for material aid for relief activity abroad and encouraged women to support men assigned to Civilian Public Service (CPS), an alternative service program for American conscientious objectors (C.O.s). MCC, together with the American Friends Service Committee, Brethren Service Committee and other agencies, sponsored this program. More than 12,000 American C.O.s chose to do "work of national importance" in CPS rather than seek noncombatant assignments in the armed forces or violate federal conscription law and be sent to prison.

Even before the bombing of Pearl Harbor, Mennonite, Brethren and Friends women's organizations assisted C.O.s in CPS camps. Women's sewing societies prepared "camp kits" consisting of bedding, towels, toiletries, stationery, stamps and other personal items, as sending-off gifts for young men assigned to CPS. Near the end of the war, an MCC official noted that "the interest of women of our churches...has been a most encouraging experience. Their Christian convictions on the question of military training and service is as deep as those of the men, and their willingness to be true to these convictions no less wholehearted...."<sup>1</sup>

CPS was not, as has often been assumed, exclusively a man's world. Approximately 2,000 pacifist women lived in and near the 151 camps and units located throughout the United States. Some, like Catherine Harder Crocker, joined the program as professional nurses and dietitians. Others, like Lois Schertz and Esther Lehrman Rinner, worked alongside male C.O.s assigned to the staffs of mental hospitals. Elva F. Gascho and others helped to administer CPS from the offices of the National Service Board for Religious Objectors and cooperating church agencies. And many of the wives of CPS assignees, including Barbara Ann Thomas, Luella Nice and Mary Wiser, followed their husbands across the country. I am grateful to these women for sharing their stories and to Marlene Epp for offering a comparative perspective on Canadian Mennonite women during World War II.

The stories that appear here are drawn from my doctoral research on the history of women in CPS. In 1992, with the help of friends, I gathered the names and addresses of women attending 50th anniversary reunions of CPS and dis-



tributed questionnaires to them. This process had a "snow-ball" effect as nearly 200 women alumni of CPS learned of my project and contributed information about their experiences. Many women reported that in retirement they have enjoyed maintaining connections with a network of World War II conscientious objectors. Some regularly attend CPS reunions; others correspond with CPS friends via round-robin letters. Their eagerness to tell their stories after half a century suggests that they value highly their participation in Civilian Public Service.

I hope that readers of this issue of Report will reflect on what World War II meant for their mothers and grandmothers. Significantly, Mennonite historical libraries and archives across North America are soliciting diaries, letters, scrap-books and photographs of women who took part in CPS and other forms of wartime activism. By preserving such documents and recalling the human drama and moral conflicts of the Second World War, we can enrich our collective identity as a people working for peace.

—Rachel Waltner Goossen, compiler

**Rachel Waltner Goossen is a historian living in Goessel, Kan. She is writing a book on American women pacifists during World War II, based on her dissertation "Conscientious Objection and Gender" (The University of Kansas, 1993). Rachel, her husband Duane and their two young children attend Goessel Mennonite Church.**

1. Camp Kits [pamphlet], (Akron, Pa.: Mennonite Central Committee, 1941).

by Elva F. (Newslinger) Gascho

## Career Choices in Wartime

In times of war, young men have been called to make definite decisions as to whether they will take up arms or whether they instead will take pacifist/nonresistant positions. Perhaps young women have not been called upon to make their decisions known in such a public way. Nevertheless, I'm sure many young men have been influenced in their decisions by the kinds of support received from mothers, sisters, wives and friends.

During World War II, many young women moved from one part of the country to another because husbands or friends were in Civilian Public Service (CPS) camps. Sometimes they worked in the camps as nurses or dieticians or in some other job. Imagine one or two women living and working in a camp with 150 men! Sometimes these women took jobs in unfamiliar communities near the camps because they had small children to support. These women were willing to live in these different situations because they believed in the way of peace as strongly as the men did.

When I was in my late twenties, I began a career as a secretary near my home community in eastern Pennsylvania. My first job was with a well-established company that manufactured bearings for various machinery companies. But after working there several months, I became aware that the company was taking more and more orders to manufacture items for the government. As I thought about that, I realized that these items were for war machinery. I began to question whether or not I wanted to continue with a company so definitely supporting the war effort. I don't recall discussing this very much with anyone, but just about the time I had decided I should look for another job, a friend called and asked if I would be interested in going to Washington, D.C., to work. The job was with the National Service Board for Religious Objectors (NSBRO). This would mean moving about 100 miles from home. What interested me most was that it was a program associated with the Mennonite church and that I would be helping in a peace witness rather than the war effort.

In August 1941, I moved to Washington and became involved in the work of NSBRO, which served as the headquarters of CPS and provided liaison between the camps and



Selective Service (the government agency responsible for assigning conscripted men). In the office where I worked, we kept records of the CPS camps and of the conscientious objectors assigned to them. There were many cases in which men did not receive proper classification from their local draft boards, and at NSBRO we assisted the men in appealing these decisions.

While in Washington I became interested in relief work, and I applied to MCC. Because of the war, MCC was only allowed to send workers abroad who could be loaned to the U.N. Relief Agency. So I decided to apply there and got a job. But I did not work there long before I realized that the people working there had different motives for relief work than I did, and that I would not likely be sent overseas by them. So again I changed jobs and worked as a secretary at The Children's Hospital, hoping that eventually MCC would have a place for me.

During the war years I became involved with the Mennonite congregation at Cottage City, Md., a suburb of Washington, D.C. In March 1944, a CPS camp opened nearby at the U.S. government dairy experiment station at Beltsville, Md. The men at the Beltsville unit wanted to retain their church relationship, and some of them attended the Cottage City church. The house where I was living with two other young

women was located in a nearby suburb. So our home became a convenient place for men to stop when they were on various errands to the city, and also a place for socializing between the men and young women of the church. At one time we said we were running United Services Organization (USO) for Civilian Public Service. USO was a service organization for men in the military, and we felt we were doing something similar for CPS

men. And of course some special relationships developed, one of which was between me and the man who eventually became my husband.

Harry and I planned to be married in February 1946, and both of us applied to MCC for overseas assignments. Eventually, MCC sent us to China for postwar rehabilitation work. We sailed from New York in August 1946 and returned to San Francisco from China in May 1949. But that is another story.

Our CPS experiences were not always easy, but the Lord guided us in the way he wanted us to go. I also think it was a learning experience for the church as a whole because different groups became aware of each other and learned to appreciate each other and work together in ways that had not been done before.

**After serving in China, Elva and Harry Gascho farmed in Nebraska for six years. During the years that the Gaschos were raising their children, Harry pastored a Mennonite congregation in Minnesota. Upon retirement they moved to Indiana, where they were associated for 10 years with Mennonite Board of Missions in Elkhart. More recently they have moved to Greencroft Retirement Center in Goshen, Ind., where they enjoy volunteer activities and traveling to visit their children.**

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by Barbara Ann (Yoder) Thomas

## A Young Amish Wife

I grew up in an Amish family, attended a country school through the eighth grade, and was married in 1940 at the age of nineteen. Our church was located between Thomas and Weatherford, Okla.

Our family all agreed that war was wrong, and our church taught against taking part in war. One scripture in particular was brought forth, "Thou Shall Not Kill." But we didn't know what "C.O." stood for until my husband, Martin, went to register. Even then we didn't know much about it.

I had one brother who was a member of a Mennonite church, and he was taught what "conscientious objector" meant. Then my dad started to converse with the Mennonite minister, and that was the way we learned how to fill out draft-related papers. Dad helped all of the young men in our church fill out their papers. My parents were supportive of all the young men and tried to help with whatever the CPS camps needed.

Martin was drafted in September 1942. The war was frightening—all so new to us—and only the Lord knew how long we would need to be separated. I had heard so much about how the C.O.s had been treated in World War I, and all I could think of was that it would be that way again. But praise God, we didn't find it that way. Our experience with CPS was great. We both made new commitments to the Lord and we are glad we went through it all.

When Martin was assigned to CPS Camp #5 northeast of Colorado Springs, I felt that we had been granted a choice to serve. I felt my husband should serve his country in a peaceful way. At the time, we were farming 60 acres of cotton to be harvested. So I took care of all of it. I moved back home to live with my parents and kept two cows so I would have spending money. At first, I wasn't sure I would be able to follow my husband to Colorado Springs since my parents were very much against it. Now I understand why my parents were against it (this little Amish girl going out into the world, as they would say).

Martin and I were separated seven months before I went to Colorado Springs. My sister-in-law and her husband went with me. There I started to work. By drawing a paycheck, I could help take care of Martin's needs.

I was a maid in a well-to-do home. I did the laundry and cleaning and when the cook had her day off I did the cooking. I stayed with the people for whom I worked and had my own room and bath. It was real nice. Later I worked at a local hospital and rented a room about two blocks away.

The town of Colorado Springs was also the site of an air force base, and I was always warned about the military men, that I ought to avoid them as much as possible. But more than once on the street bus a soldier got up and gave me his seat, as the buses were usually full. I respected that.

I attended a Mennonite church and also another church with the lady I worked with. I was accepted wherever I went.

Martin served in CPS for three and a half years. After 11 months at Colorado Springs, he was transferred to a dairy farm northwest of town. Two years later he was transferred to another dairy. Our son Richard had been born in June 1944, so while we lived on the farm I didn't work outside the home; there was plenty to do right there. The boss was against C.O.s, but by that point in the war they were the only men available for farm work. He was good, oh so good at times, but then on other days he was the opposite. I never felt too comfortable around him. His wife was nicer to be around—I helped her with her work.

I knew that CPS was the only way for us—knew Jesus had taught "love your enemies." Being part of CPS changed our outlook on life. There was so much more out there to enjoy than what we had been taught. Other churches were more outgoing, more involved in service and sharing with others. Martin and I changed our membership to the Mennonite church, and our Christian life started to grow. Still, we were thankful for the Amish church, as there are many wonderful, God-fearing people willing to help those in need. After the war was over and the CPS men from our Oklahoma community came home, the church had a collection and divided the money among the young men.

Martin and I have been married 53 years and have attended many CPS reunions. It's always enjoyable meeting the others again. CPS was a great experience, and hopefully our grandchildren will have the same opportunity if the need arises again. Praise God, it reminded us what Christ-following really is.

**Barbara Ann Thomas and her husband Martin live on a farm near Hydro, Okla., and attend Pleasant View Mennonite Church. Now retired, they volunteer at the local Et Cetera Shop and enjoy quilting, gardening and spending time with children and grandchildren.**

"Is it not time to appoint someone to write a history of the part played by women in war...and in international relations? Otherwise, the only records will be histories written by men of what the men did."

—Dr. Aletha Jacobs, Paris, 1926, quoted in Jo Ann

Robinson, "Women, War and Resistance to War: A Transnational Perspective," *Peace and Change* 4 (Fall 1977): 8.

by Lois (Schertz) Schertz

## War, Alternative Service and a Reality Jolt

Russell and I were married in December 1941. The following June, he was drafted and went to Weeping Water, Neb., to work at a Civilian Public Service camp in soil conservation. I went to live with my parents in central Illinois and continued teaching school.

In our rural community there was little preparation for us as young people in thinking about the peace position of the Mennonite Church. Conference leaders came to talk with the men, and I remember my father and brothers attending the meetings, but we women gave it little thought. We were really jolted into reality with the declaration of war, because we would face separation in our marriages.

There was a lot of hostility in our community toward C.O.s, especially as the war escalated. I was in danger of losing my teaching job because my husband was a C.O., so when he wrote that there were openings in mental hospitals for conscientious objectors and their wives, I was elated. I must confess that it was not out of conviction, but because I could be with him.

Had I known what was before me, I probably would not have been so ecstatic. We worked with a CPS unit at the Mt. Pleasant State Hospital in Iowa. The administrator there had asked for married men because the hospital needed women attendants. Even though some of us had the skills to do other kinds of work, we were only allowed to work on the wards. In the beginning we worked 12 hours a day, with one day off a week and one Sunday off a month.

On our first free Sunday, we attended a Baptist church, where we were received coldly. The next month we went to a Methodist church, which was a little better. After that, we decided to conduct our own services.

Even though the working conditions at the Mt. Pleasant State Hospital were deplorable, there were many good things that came from that experience for me as a woman. The unit became a family. We bonded together in a beautiful way, both men and women. For example, in our church services,

men and women both participated. This was my first experience in being allowed to lead a worship service. (I went back home after the war and it took a good 30 years for that to happen.)

We also discussed what it meant to be a C.O. Initially, we focused on issues related to conscription and conscientious objection, but through discussions and study we realized that there were much broader implications in promoting peace.

There was a Mennonite church about 15 miles from Mt. Pleasant. Because of gas rationing, members of our unit could not attend often. The few times we did attend, we never felt very comfortable because the congregation was a bit more conservative than most of us in the CPS unit. When the Mennonite bishop from the area came to ask if we wanted to receive communion, we agreed—but soon learned that it was being offered just to "Old Mennonite" persons and not to those of General Conference background. This was beyond our comprehension, because those of us in the CPS unit felt no distinction between the two groups. Our silent protest was that we refused to go and held our own communion service instead.

On another occasion the CPS men were invited to give a program at the nearby Mennonite church. The men, without thinking, asked three of us who sang in a trio to accompany them. The other women in the trio belonged to the General Conference, and they didn't wear coverings, so I thought I wouldn't wear mine. When we entered the church and the leader discovered we were planning to sing, he suggested that it wouldn't be appropriate.

These experiences in CPS represented a turning point in my life. I began to realize that, as a woman, I had gifts that could be used in the church. I also realized that I had gifts for promoting the peace position of my church, although I ran into a lot of obstacles as I re-entered the life of my church in my home community.

In recent years, my husband and I have enjoyed reunions with friends from our days in CPS. Laughingly, we've told those from the General Conference that it was when we served together with them that we realized there would also be G.C.'s in heaven!

**After teaching school for 25 years, Lois Schertz retired with her husband Russell in Goshen, Ind. Her main interests include grandparenting, writing and volunteering—including working with a support group concerned with spouse abuse.**

## Publications

*Silent Labourers* by Doris Dube, Matopo Book Centre, Bulawayo, Zimbabwe, is a collection of stories about Zimbabwean and Zambian Brethren in Christ (BIC) women who have labored tirelessly and often anonymously in their churches and communities. Copies of the

95-page booklet can be purchased through MCC Women's Concerns, Box 500, Akron, PA 17501, for \$6 U.S.; \$8 Cdn.

*Why Didn't I Just Raise Radishes?* by Melodie M. Davis, Herald Press, 1994, is a collection of short meditations exploring the magic of the ordinary.

by Catherine Harder Crocker

## A Nurse's Story

In 1943, I graduated from Bethel Deaconess Hospital School of Nursing in Newton, Kan. I soon became restless in my first position as an R.N. in a very small hospital in Idaho and toyed with the idea of joining the military. But after a representative from MCC contacted me, I became interested in being a CPS camp nurse. From the spring of 1944 until the fall of 1945, I worked at two camps—the smokejumpers unit based near Missoula, Mont., and the CPS camp at Glacier National Park at Belton, Mont.

As a camp nurse, I felt that I was witnessing to the Mennonite peace testimony, along with the young men. I really enjoyed my work. At Camp #103, the smokejumpers unit, C.O.s had volunteered from base camps administered by the American Friends Service Committee, the Brethren Service Committee and MCC. Officials of the U.S. Forest Service then selected men who were suitable candidates for

firefighting and parachuting into small burning wilderness fires. Some of the men came to this unit because of frustration with the seemingly unimportant work of the base camps. Others came to “prove” that they were not cowards just because they objected to war and all its tragedies.

My responsibilities were to maintain the infirmary for those injured or ill. I also taught some of the jumpers to help give Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever shots to fellow jumpers. Because their training was very strenuous, there were many blisters, bruises, strains, sprains and a few fractures. All the men learned first aid skills from Forest Service personnel. If serious accidents occurred near camp, I tended the injured in the back of a truck on the way to a Missoula hospital. I had to maintain records of all visits to the infirmary, trips to the dentists and hospitalizations. At the smokejumpers unit, morale was very high, and each person who was injured was eager to get back into training as soon as possible.

There were a few frustrations associated with my work, such as the lack of female friendships, though I certainly was not lacking in male friendships. As I was the only unmarried woman around, I received a lot of attention, most of it welcome. Eventually I married Herb Crocker, one of the jumpers.

After my husband's discharge and our marriage in October 1945, we moved to his hometown of Minneapolis. Because there was a great shortage of nurses, I had no problem finding a position. But my husband's education had been disrupted by the war, and with his background as a wartime C.O., he had great difficulty finding work.

CPS widened my horizons. After some years we became members of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers). During the Vietnam War, our three older sons were very involved in protests. One went to Canada, one went to prison and one did alternative service in the local community as the Selective Service System had changed. Our sons did not have the network of friends going through similar experiences that my husband and I had during World War II. In fact, to this day our sons maintain friendships with our CPS friends.

Catherine Crocker lives in Lake Elmo, Minn. Since her husband's death, she has lived in an apartment in her home with a son and his family occupying the main part of the house. She especially cherishes the daily visits of her two-year-old grandson. Catherine is active in her local Friends Meeting, does weekly respite care for an elderly man, and enjoys visits and letters from family and friends.



**Waters of Reflection:**  
*Meditations for Everyday* by Sandra Drescher Lehman, Good Books, 1993, centers on the themes of water and God as found in the characteristics of water.

**"How to be More Accountable to Each Other,"** *Carrying God's Light, Strength for the Journey*, by Marlene Kropf. This booklet is a joint publication of WM and WMSC, 1993, that issues an invitation to spiritual friendship. Available from WMSC, 219-294-7131, or WM, 316-283-5100.

**"Natural Connections,"** is a new MCC booklet that contains faith stories from African and African-American Christians on five topics: worship and prayer, perseverance in hard times, family, affirming ethnicity, and evan-

gelism and church growth. Appropriate for S.S. classes and small groups. Free from all MCC offices.

by Luella Nice

## Remembering CPS

We were a young Mennonite family living in Sheridan, Ore., when my husband, Howard, left for CPS camp at Belton, Mont. He left on July 10, 1944, while I was still in bed after the birth of our second child. Judi was 10 days old, and I had had some complications so was not feeling well. It was very hard to have him leave not knowing when or if we could join him. There were many tears.

I had two babies—our older daughter, Marlene, was approximately 18 months old at the time. We had very little money. Things were very uncertain. From an MCC fund for dependents of CPS men I received \$25 a month for myself and \$10 a month for each of the girls; that gave us \$45 a month to live on.

I did get to move to Belton when Judi was two months old. A cousin went with us. It took us several days on the train. That was a whole experience in itself. We had shipped bedding, a few cooking utensils and other things. Those were not disposable diaper days.

Our first home was a small one-room cabin about a mile from camp. It was a very sparsely-furnished, single-wall cabin. We could see daylight through the cracks. I think the rent was \$20 a month. We then moved to an old three-room house, a shack really. It was pretty bad. It was so cold. Ice formed in our water bucket in the house. We paid \$25 a month for this house. This left \$20 to live on. Howard tried to help out. Sometimes he cut wood. He even made wire clothes hangers to earn a little money for us.

It was a very difficult time. We had to have milk for the girls and sometimes there was very little in the house to eat. One time Howard finally went to the local store and charged about \$4 worth of groceries. The next day we received \$20 in the mail from a member of my family. God was faithful in spite of the hard times. I thank him for that.

We had many lessons to learn. Once we put some of our perishable food in the

creek to keep cool. We think a bear robbed us. What a disappointment. We had so little to lose.

The men at the CPS camp were mostly Mennonite and Amish, and they were assigned to work at Glacier National Park. Our family was one of several who lived near the camp. Across the road from our house lived a friend from Oregon with her three children; her husband was also in CPS. It helped a lot to have someone to talk to. Together we made clothes for our children. I washed diapers and clothes by hand until I moved near my friend, who let me do laundry in her old washer.

Howard was in CPS a few weeks short of two years. After serving in Montana, he was transferred to the Veterans Administration Hospital in Roseburg, Ore. I moved back to our home community and Howard's sister moved in with me and the girls. Howard tried to come home every two weeks or so. Gas was rationed and money was scarce, so it was hard.

CPS was a very important part of our lives. It was a very hard part but a very good part. There were some fun times and some happy memories, and knowing we had done the right thing was important to us. God certainly kept his hand over us during that time.

**Luella Nice is a homemaker who, with her husband Howard, raised six children. The Nices live in McMinnville, Ore.**



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by Mary Wiser

## Searching for a Brotherly Life in a Warring World

I grew up on a farm in western New York State in the aftermath of World War I. My parents, who were Christians, never talked about war and peace, but the atmosphere in our home provided a basis for faith in a God of love. In complete contrast were my early impressions of war from the movies *The Big Parade* and *All's Quiet on the Western Front*, stereopticon slides of trench warfare, and tales told by a neighbor who had returned from combat. I also remember antiwar Sunday school lessons put out by the Methodist Church in the 1920s. By the time I was in high school, I knew that war was wrong and that I couldn't support it.

Before college I had never met a conscientious objector, but at Cornell University I found a small group of pacifists with whom I shared many interests. These friends and the activities of the Cornell United Religious Work strengthened my understanding and convictions about war and introduced new ideas of how to try to eliminate the occasion for war. I became engaged to Arthur Wiser, a member of this small group of students.

In 1941, just before Pearl Harbor, I left public school teaching because I knew that once our country declared war, I could not supervise war bond sales. Nor did I want to be part of the accelerating groundswell toward war that seemed to be required of public school teachers.

That December, Art and I married six months earlier than we had originally planned so that together we could face whatever might come. Art was drafted in 1942. We were together for most of his three years in CPS, although we usually lived separately.

I was able to get jobs to support myself near two of the three camp sites where Art was assigned. I also had a little money saved from my public teaching years, which went a long way. When I could, I paid \$30 a month to the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) for Art's expenses in CPS.

As I followed Art to the various CPS locations, I did housework and waited tables. I also taught in a Tennessee mission school, a cultural island where conscientious objection was

acceptable. Later I taught on the North Dakota prairie in a one-room school where I lived in the basement during the week. There I experienced the suspicion and antagonism of parents. But the school boards in that isolated area were desperate for teachers and hired us CPS wives who had gathered near the Trenton, N.D., camp that was operated by AFSC. One time the entire parent population descended on me. It worked out all right; we talked over their objections to my teaching, but they said, "It's not you, it's your cowardly husband in that camp."

I also lived in a camp for two months, at Walhalla, Mich., where I worked as secretary in the after-work study program for CPS men. At Walhalla we grew close to a group of 12 men (and the wives of some) who were drawn together to study cooperative living. By the decision of this group, another wife and I milked cows one winter to help keep Macedonia Co-op Community afloat in north Georgia.

In 1944-45, while Art was in the Trenton camp, we enjoyed the comradeship of the same 12 men and wives we had met in Walhalla. They had requested transfer together to Trenton, and the group studied, played and planned together in off-hours. Our intent was to be part of a postwar co-op community, and we made group decisions about what we would do when the war ended.

As the third year of CPS for Art dragged on into 1945, the enthusiasm for living together in community gradually waned in the Trenton camp. Members of the small group began to look for ways to get out of the wearing situation, for example, by seeking transfer individually to other CPS projects. The expense of running the camps was a huge burden on AFSC, MCC and other sponsoring agencies, which by that time were beginning to turn to much-needed war relief work. We were learning of the extermination camps in Germany. Art began to link his acceptance of conscription with the lack of individual responsibility for one's action we saw in the German soldiers who followed orders in the Nazi death camps.

After months of thinking and talking it over, Art "walked out" of the Trenton camp—after informing all the authorities involved and giving his whereabouts. This led to a seven-month stretch in a federal prison in Minnesota. During that time my parents opened their home to me and our infant son. My parents and Art's had consistently been supportive, although they didn't fully understand or agree with our actions. My home church was cool, though personally I felt love too. People tried to overlook Art's position and my supporting him. I noticed their embarrassment, especially during Art's time in prison.

"[After Pearl Harbor] I remember feeling, like many women did, that I wished I were a man so that my conscientious objection could be recorded."

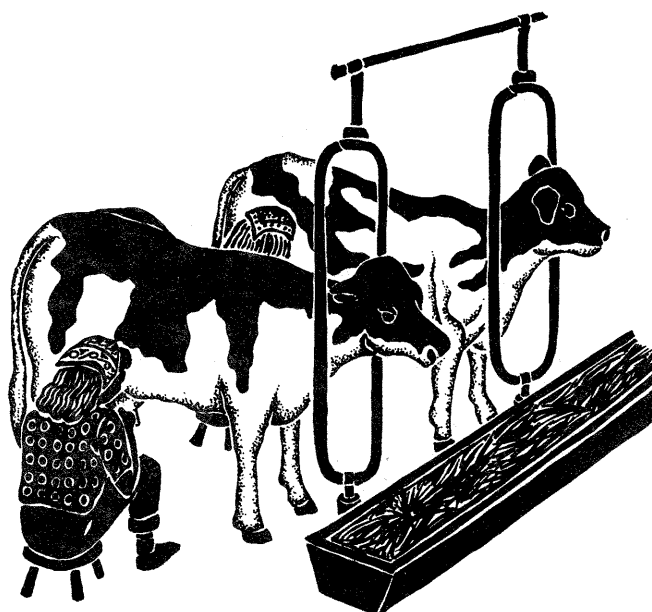
—*Elise Boulding, quoted in Judith Porter Adams, Peacework: Oral Histories of Women Peace Activists (Boston: Wayne Publishers, 1991), 186.*

After Art was released from prison, we were able to join the co-op community in Macedonia, Ga. Within a few years five other CPS couples also joined. CPS brought us together with many young couples who felt the way we did, not only about war, but about what causes war and what kinds of constructive work, recreation, and worship might be alternatives. By uniting C.O.s from all over and from all ranks, CPS did us a great service.

From May 1946 to the present, Art and I have lived communally with others. The search for a way of truth and love at Macedonia led us to the Bruderhof of Hutterian Brethren (at that time, the legal name was the Society of Brothers). Four of our six children are also members. Five couples from our CPS days are still brothers and sisters in the Hutterian Brethren. Besides these there are many other CPS people in the Bruderhof communities.

Fellow CPSers have enriched us immeasurably. Those years of CPS were a piece of the road which led us to a full-time, total commitment of our lives to the kingdom of God in Christ. Through our seeking we learned that love was calling us to a brotherly way of life. It has been half a lifetime since those days of CPS, and we are still on the road together—with many others who have found their way along different paths.

**Mary and Arthur Wiser have lived in several Bruderhofs. They now are in Pleasant View Bruderhof, Ulster Park, N.Y., where they enjoy the beautiful Hudson Valley. Their joy is living with brothers and sisters and children (including grandchildren).**



by Esther Lehrman Rinner

## Working in a Mental Hospital

I attended high school in Aberdeen, Idaho. Our church, the only Mennonite one in Idaho, was very isolated, and we did not hear much about the C.O. position. Our pastor, Rev. Phil Wedel, had been a C.O. in World War I and he talked about this at times, but during World War II most of the young men from our church went into military service (only two or three C.O.s compared to 25 or more servicemen). Our church had a plaque in the back of the church on which were the names of all those who went into military service. It was a "Roll of Honor."

My parents were opposed to war. I remember my father ordering many copies of a booklet in the early 1940s, titled *Dare We Break the Vicious Cycle of Fighting Evil with Evil?* It was by American clergyman Harry Emerson Fosdick, and my father handed these out to people who came to his grocery store.

When the war broke out, I was a student at Bethel College in North Newton, Kan. Beginning in the fall of 1942, I taught for three years, first at a rural school east of Newton and then in a small town in Idaho near an air base. I did not speak too much of conscientious objection because the teachers I worked with were much involved with military people. My roommate had a fiance in the South Pacific. Another teacher married a soldier with whom she had been corresponding.

In school we were to push the buying of war stamps and bonds. Every Friday there was a contest to see how much each class could buy. Children brought money to school to buy war stamps. Different classes made posters to encourage children to buy the stamps and to compete with other classes. I felt a little guilty about this and didn't know how to get out of doing it. Instead of making a poster with war-like things—such as war tanks or guns—I made one with parachutes. If children brought stamp money they could put up a parachute on the poster. I guess I felt that parachutes were saving lives instead of taking life.

In 1944 I read an item in *The Mennonite* describing MCC's two new summer service units for women at Ypsilanti, Mich., and Howard, R.I. Young women would be assigned



sometimes felt that the patients weren't treated as people but were mostly herded in large groups from here to there. We had only one or two attendants for about 90 to 100 patients, and there wasn't time for personal interaction. When I worked the evening shift, at times I was the only attendant for three floors of patients—300 of them. Doors were locked, even the telephone was locked up, and the keys were on a cord tied around my waist. That was scary!

Some of the employees at Ypsilanti State Hospital did not think too highly of C.O.s. These employees had husbands or sons or boyfriends in the military and felt that it wasn't fair for C.O.s to have it so easy while their families were out fighting. Some of the employees put out an underground paper called the Buttercup News, which was very derogatory toward the men in CPS, who were considered "buttercups" (yellow, or cowardly). On balance, though, I was treated O.K. by regular employees.

After being in the unit and experiencing the interaction with other young people and having seen something other than my small provincial community, I knew I didn't want to continue being a teacher in a small town. I finished college and then served with MCC in Puerto Rico. In 1949 I married Andrew James Rinner, whom I had met while in the summer service unit at Ypsilanti.

As a young woman I was attracted to CPS partly for the opportunity to see another part of the country. My best memories of those years include meeting so many other Mennonite young people from various parts of the country and forming friendships. I value the worship and cultural experiences that we had together.

I have found that the most satisfaction in life comes from serving others and being involved with those in need, and that one gains more from the people one serves than from what one gives to them. I probably wouldn't have had the motivation to go to Puerto Rico for voluntary service had I not had the Ypsilanti experience first. And I'm grateful for the lasting effects of CPS, such as improved mental health care in institutions throughout the United States.

**Esther Lehrman Rinner lives in Newton, Kan. For nearly 15 years she worked for the General Conference Mennonite Church, where she was administrative assistant for the Commission on Home Ministries. Since retirement she has enjoyed volunteer work in her church and community. She and her husband have two daughters and five grandchildren.**

to work alongside drafted C.O.s in state mental hospitals. This appealed to me, and I applied and was accepted to the program at Ypsilanti. I liked the work so much that I went back the following summer. That year, 1945, I extended my stay as a member of Ypsilanti's relief training unit, an educational program in which male C.O.s and approximately two dozen women prepared together for overseas assignments in Egypt, Puerto Rico and elsewhere.

As an attendant at the Ypsilanti State Hospital, I felt I was doing a service, much like the men in CPS. At the same time, I could enjoy the social and educational activities provided by the unit in off-hours. Those of us in the Women's Summer Service unit received a small allowance. Our housing was furnished in a dormitory at the state hospital. We had to purchase a meal ticket and ate with regular staff employees in the hospital dining room.

My work consisted mostly of seeing that patients did the tasks that they were supposed to do on the ward. I took patients to the dining room, handed out clean clothes, and saw that they had their weekly showers and didn't fight with other patients. In general, care was good, but everything was en masse and there wasn't much individual attention. I

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by John R. Kellam

## Keeping Faith With Husband Jailed for Conscience

My wife, Carol Zens Kellam, died of cancer in 1967 at the age of 51. Two decades before that, during the Second World War, we experienced an enforced separation when I went to prison as a conscientious objector. Carol's role was generously supportive, and I shall try to interpret her impressions of that time as well as I can, regretting that she is not present to tell her story firsthand.

In 1941, some months before Pearl Harbor, Carol and I began attending Friends Meeting for worship. We were conscientiously opposed to war and were exasperated with the government's eagerness to join in the military violence. Neither of us knew pacifists before then, although we were both pacifists before finding our compatible religious home among Friends.

Early in 1941, I had requested classification as a C.O. Three years later, my draft board denied the application, and in January 1945 after being arrested and tried, I was fined \$1,000 and sentenced to a five-year prison term. I spent a few months in the minimum security institution at Milan, Mich., before being transferred to the maximum security federal prison at Lewisburg, Pa.

Carol was pregnant with our first child, and Quaker friends in Toledo gave us moral support and helped Carol move back to her mother's home in Washington, D.C. Florida Avenue (Washington) Friends Meeting then assisted her in every way. Carol got a clerical job at U.S. News & World Report, which she kept until the baby's birth became imminent. That made it possible, along with about \$1,000 in savings and another \$1,000 loaned to us by my mother, to emerge from the war owing only that single debt.

Carol made friends at work, including one very dear confidant—the wife of a young doctor. If any of Carol's coworkers felt disdainful of our antiwar attitudes, they apparently kept respectfully silent about it, for Carol did not mention any hostility or harassment from them to me afterward. She did not counter the prevailing propaganda by trying to convert coworkers to pacifism. The U.S. News & World Report was generally super-patriotic in its editorial policy, more even than Time or Newsweek, and Carol would not have

attacked any stone wall like that. Her co-workers were intelligent enough not to attack her because of me.

Carol and I had agreed to rule out CPS participation. We knew a lot of men in various camps, including some who were sorely embarrassed at finding that some regular employees in forestry, mental hospitals and weather stations, had been discharged from their positions to be volunteers or draftees into military service due to the influx of C.O.s into CPS work in their fields. If I could by replacement cause another man to go to war, I might as well have volunteered myself! Carol, for the same reason, supported my decision not to accept any work assignments in prison, since prison shops were producing items of use in the war effort and all the jobs assigned to inmates were interchangeable at the order of prison officials.

Because of my refusal to accept work assignments in prison, there ensued an interesting series of coercive experiments designed to force compliance and submission to authority. This included censorship of mail so tight as to cut off communication. Although Carol worried at the lack of news, we had anticipated the problem beforehand and had resolved to endure the hardship while trusting each other's strength of purpose. Officials eventually decided to minimize their stress upon us and to let matters rest until they released me in November 1946. I was reunited with Carol and our daughter, 15-month-old Susan, whom I had never seen.

One thought helped Carol to survive the separation: our plight was in no way a unique type of suffering, when we considered that in any war there are hundreds of different ways in which families get victimized. Inconveniences, impoverishments, injuries, deaths and disgraces are imposed wholesale upon most of the population of any nation at war, while a smaller number are elevated by war profits and honors. We had caught a different type of bullet because we had refused to give our conscience over to the warring government.

Afterward, we did not have to suffer a guilty memory of having destroyed people and their property. We could breathe freer for having avoided the pressures to treat others as viciously as we were being treated. Faith in service to God had given us the strength to survive and, although weakened, we remained in basically good health. We had hope that the larger community could ultimately become more understanding of our role in opposing war and might even learn to respect our efforts to prevent all wars.

**John R. Kellam, a retired city planner, lives in Providence, R.I., and is active in the Providence Friends Meeting. During retirement he has become an avid sailor and a Coast Guard Auxiliarist.**

**"Christian faith makes uncritical patriotism impossible."**

**—Peter Mokres, cited in  
Jeanne Larson, compiler,  
Seeds of Peace (Philadelphia:  
New Society Publishers,  
1987), 96. Used by permis-  
sion.**

by Marlene Epp

## Canadian Mennonite Women as C.O.s in World War II

In Canada, where the government rather than a coalition of churches sponsored alternative service work for conscientious objectors, Mennonite women were less likely than their American counterparts to follow husbands and boyfriends to camps. In fact, most Canadian objectors worked at individual posts assigned by government officials, so Canadian Mennonite women had relatively few opportunities to relocate near camps. Nor did church agencies in Canada attempt to organize women for work assignments, as happened in the United States with women's summer service units and relief training.

While their actions may not have had the public and legal implications that opposition to military conscription had for men, Canadian Mennonite women were clearly grappling with what it meant to be a nonresistant people. One significant response was their interest in providing material relief—canning, knitting, and sewing—for victims of the war. A few women, like Arlene Sitler of Kitchener, helped with clothing distribution abroad. Sitler, who went to England, affirmed the material relief sent by Canadian Mennonite women. Through their giving, she wrote, "the bonds of peace and Christian fellowship may become stronger throughout the world."<sup>2</sup>

Mennonite women in Canada also provided support for C.O.s in alternative service. Local women's groups mailed care packages, which included clothing, baked goods, letters and even carefully copied sermons from home churches. One woman, describing the material assistance and moral support that she and others gave to men in alternative service, said, "We are representing a common cause... United we stand, divided we fall."<sup>3</sup>

Canadian Mennonite women recognized that the war placed extra demands on them in sustaining their households. Many Mennonite women entered the paid labour force to bring in more money for their families. Others took in boarders, did washing and ironing for neighbors, and moved in with relatives to save money. Often women stepped out of traditional roles as homemakers and into the vacant shoes of their men-



folk. In 1942 a Toronto newspaper featured a Mennonite farm north of the city where a pair of Wideman sisters were running the farm in the absence of men. The article, titled "Girls Man the Farm Front," described how Anna plowed 120 acres while her sister Ella "did a man's job daily."<sup>4</sup>

But while some women were able to manage financially, the war meant economic difficulty for others. Canadian C.O.s received little remuneration for their work, typically 50 cents a day. After 1942, when alternative service terms were extended for the duration, some households had difficulty staying afloat. By 1944, a number of Mennonite conferences and congregations in Canada had established funds to aid dependents of C.O.s. At the same time, the Canadian government addressed the problem by appropriating allowances for dependents. Although most of these funds became available only near the end of the war, married men whose families showed financial need were eligible for \$5-10 per month and more if the family included dependent children.

Mennonite women in Canada worked to clothe and feed war sufferers overseas, sent letters and packages to Mennonite men in camps and in government-arranged work assignments, and sought new strategies to provide for their families. They found ways to cope with the implications of being part of a peace church, even though they did not always receive support from their congregations or neighbors. Nevertheless, they put into action their own expressions of nonresistant love and thus participated wholeheartedly as conscientious objectors to suffering in the world.

*[Adapted from Epp's article "'United We Stand, Divided We Fall: Canadian Mennonite Women as COs in World War II,' Mennonite Life 48 (September 1993): 7-10.]*

**Marlene Epp is a doctoral candidate in Canadian history at University of Toronto. Her dissertation focuses on Mennonite women immigrants and their families in the mid-20th century.**

2. Arlene Sitler, "A Challenge to Mennonite Women," Women's Activities Letter 18 (February 1946): 1-3.
3. Clara Snider to Workers of the Nonresistant Relief Sewing Organization, October 16, 1942, John Coffman Letters, Conrad Grebel College Archives.
4. "Girls Man the Farm Front," Star Weekly, 14 August 1943.

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by Vange Willms Thiessen

## Journeying To Justice

*In January, Thiessen was part of a study tour to Asia focusing on the exploitation of women and children in Asian-Pacific countries. Following are two articles of her reflections on the tour.*

"A voice is heard in Ramah,  
lamentation and bitter weeping.  
Rachel is weeping for her children;  
she refuses to be comforted for her children,  
Because they are no more.....  
.....There is reward for your work.  
There is hope for your future, says the Lord....  
.....And the Lord has created a new thing on earth—  
A woman encompasses a man."  
NRSV, Jeremiah 31: 15,16 & 22

As one walks through the northern villages of Thailand there is a striking absence of young girls between the ages of 10 and 16. If you see a beautiful new house you know this house has no daughter inside. Kamla was one such daughter. When an agent came to her village looking for girls to work in the south, her father exchanged Kamla for an advance payment of 3000 baht (\$120 US). In addition there were promises of a new roof, a refrigerator and a color TV for the family home.

Kamla left her parents, poor rice farmers barely able to feed a growing family. Her father had been seriously injured when a bus collided with a lorry. There was no money for medical costs. Kamla understood she was heading for Bangkok to work as a domestic servant in a wealthy household. Her earnings would make life easier for her parents.

Instead Kamla was taken to a brothel in Phuket, a popular beach resort in southern Thailand. The anticipated good fortune turned into a sexual nightmare. Work consisted of "receiving 5 to 7 guests per night," after which she was locked up in a room. Her life ended tragically when a fire engulfed the brothel where six girls were trapped and burned to death.

The children are no more. There is mourning and weeping in all of Thailand. It is estimated that 800,000 children have

**"Men and women of common sense may hope for profound transformations, may imagine peaceable worlds."**

**—Jean Bethke Elshtain,  
Women and War (New York:  
Basic Books, 1987), 91. Used  
by permission.**

been lured, tricked or kidnapped into child prostitution. Due to the fear of AIDS, sex tourists demand young girls who are less likely to be infected. Where is there hope for the future?

As I visited here, an "awakening" tempered the myopic vision and anesthetized reaction of my own North American consciousness. Moral values were seriously shaken from their complacent niches of western Christianity. What facilitated my awakening? Women of the Philippines and Thailand. I saw their hope for the future motivating their work in the present. Here loyal, sensitive, courageous women are coming together to be a political, economic and social presence in their country.

I saw Christ incarnated. Gabriela, an alliance of some 200 women's organizations in the Philippines, in many ways is fulfilling the words of the prophet Isaiah:

Voices for agrarian reform in order to  
bring good news to the poor;  
Rehabilitation and release for the  
children of political prisoners;  
Alternatives for the prostituted women  
trapped by sexual slavery;  
Freedom and self-respect from the oppression  
of exploitive and violent relationships.

The women's organizations include women from the grass-roots and professional women, joining to address concerns of: street children and child prostitution, Amerasian children fathered by U.S. servicemen, economics and women's development, violence against women, political prisoners, international trafficking of women, overseas domestic contract workers, maternal and child health, mail order brides and other justice issues.

The example of our south-east Asian sisters is compelling. Amid the pain and suffering, I saw hope in my Asian sisters. They model authentic relationships, strength in solidarity, empowerment by their choices, resiliency of spirit. I stood in the Christ-light of their presence.

As I return to North America, amid the affluence, materialism and religiosity, darkness encompasses me and I search for the light. As I grope to find the way, I ask for the hands of my North American and Asian sisters. We need each other as we journey toward justice. •

**by Vange Willms Thiessen**

## **Women and the Economics of Disempowerment**

We deplaned in Manila, the Philippines, amid the sensual experience of new sights, sounds and smells. The next morning as we travelled to Quezon City, I began to feel the impact of Third World poverty. Conditions of the urban poor were overwhelming. The discrepancy between the Philippines and North America creates a dilemma for me. It seems so morally wrong. I want to put the countries in a large fruit basket and give it a good shake—fruit basket upset—then spread it all out equally.

A particular theme for my reflection has been the concept of disempowerment. Since my exposure, the vivid pictures of economic oppression do not fade easily. The effects on women are disempowerment. Most frequently it is the women who occupy the lowest positions. They work in hazardous conditions and are exploited in factories, domestic service, prostitution and tourism. Abroad, women working as nannies, domestic help and entertainers are virtually unprotected from physical and psychological abuses.

Economic poverty takes away power. The power to access resources and opportunities is primarily controlled by the country's development policies and foreign exploitation. Personal power disintegrates because of dehumanization, violence and oppression. In the face of these circumstances we saw women time and again demonstrate tremendous courage and fortitude. We saw the organizations that have resulted out of economic, social and political need. Their actions are giving a sense of empowerment to women throughout the country.

I come home to Canada and I see the wealth and so-called prosperity. I also see the disempowerment of women. What's wrong? It's not supposed to be this way. How is it that economic wealth disempowers? What are the effects on women of a country where there is economic viability and affluence?

My thoughts lead me to believe that the consumerism and materialism of the West seem to contribute to a sense of disempowerment and disintegration. We have so much

## Women in Ministry

- Teresa McDermid is new pastor at Sunrise Mennonite Church in Clackamas, Ore.
- Marianne Mellinger was ordained to pastoral ministry at Germantown (Pa.) Mennonite Church on April 24.
- Kathy Neufeld Dunn, pastor of Shalom Community Church in Ann Arbor, Mich., was ordained May 15.
- April Yamasaki has accepted a call as senior pastor for Emmanuel Mennonite Church in Clearbrook, B.C. She is the first woman to be placed in a leading pastoral role in the Conference of Mennonites in B.C.

more than we need. The overindulgence anesthetizes awareness and paralyzes action. In the environment of our opulent homes we become more and more self-serving, isolating ourselves from the global realities. Women have lost the sense of affiliation and solidarity. We have lost the desire to be a sister's keeper.

How do we attack the force of disempowerment in the midst of economic wealth? How do we move from passivity to action? How do we create awareness and vision beyond our own select group of friends and acquaintances? When will we need each other again? Will it require an economic crisis?

Vange Willms Thiessen of Abbotsford, BC travelled to south-east Asia as part of a study/exposure tour called "Journeying to Justice" sponsored by the Center for the Prevention of Sexual and Domestic Violence in Seattle, Wash. She is a member of the MCC B.C. Committee on Women's Concerns.



## News and Verbs

- The next **Women in Ministry conference** will be May 26-28, 1995, at Colombia Bible College in Clearbrook, B.C. The conference theme will be, "**Unity and Uniqueness in Christ.**" This will be a celebration of global sisterhood, with focus on exploring spirituality by learning from women around the world. The conference is open to all Mennonite and Brethren in Christ women. For more information contact Miriam Ruiz, MCC B.C. Women's Concerns, Box 2038, Clearbrook BC V2T 3T8; 604-850-6639.
- "One half is male and the other half female. The load of life is on the shoulders of both," goes the title song of a **new audio-cassette, "Responsibility of Life."** The tape, **produced by a Nepali women's group**, features 10 original songs that focus on discrimination against women and general conditions of women in Nepal. The songs are in Nepali, and the tape is accompanied by a booklet with words in Nepali and English. The cassette was produced by the United Mission to Nepal Advisory Group on Nepali Women. It can be ordered from MCC Central/South Asia Desk, Box 500, Akron, PA 17501, for \$7 U.S./\$9.50 Cdn.
- Graduate students pursuing **careers in nursing** are invited to apply for loans offered by Mennonite Health Services and Mennonite Board of Missions. Loans, available from the Miller-Erb Nursing Development Fund, range from \$300-\$2,000 per study year. Applications due Feb. 1, 1995; contact MHS, 2160 Lincoln Hwy East, Box 6, Lancaster, PA 17602-1150; phone 717-293-7125.
- "Shaping Sexual Character: **Modeling and Teaching Healthy Sexuality**" will be the theme of the Church Leaders Conference at Bluffton (Ohio) College, October 17-18. The conference is for pastors, Christian education staff, Sunday school teachers and other interested people. Resource persons will be Dr. Marva Dawn, author of *Sexual Character: Beyond Technique to Intimacy*, and Dr. Ted Koontz, associate professor of ethics and peace studies at AMBS. For information contact Randy Keeler, Bluffton College, 419-358-3219.



Illustrations in this issue were drawn by Teresa Pankratz of Chicago. Please do not reproduce without permission.

- “A Door of Hope,” a conference on family violence will be at **Dalhousie Mennonite Brethren Community Church** in Calgary, Alta., September 30-October 1. Speakers will be Carolyn Holderread Heggen and David Schroeder. The conference is sponsored by MCC Alberta; for information call 403-275-1751.
- “Moving Toward Healing—Sexual Abuse and the Church” will be a conference at **College Mennonite Church** in Goshen, Ind., November 11-12. Keynote speaker will be Carolyn Holderread Heggen. For information call the planning committee secretary, 219-533-1044.
- Rebecca Slough has ended her pastorate at First Mennonite Church in San Francisco, to be field education director and **director of congregational studies** at Bethany Theological Seminary in Dayton, Ohio.

WOMEN'S CONCERNS REPORT is published bimonthly by the MCC Committees on Women's Concerns. We believe that Jesus Christ teaches equality of all persons. By sharing information and ideas, the committees strive to promote new relationships and corresponding supporting structures through which women and men can grow toward wholeness and mutuality. Articles and views presented in REPORT do not necessarily reflect official positions of the Committees on Women's Concerns.

WOMEN'S CONCERNS REPORT is edited by Kristina Mast Burnett. Layout by Janice Wiebe Ollenburger.

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### Women's Publications/Women's Writings

The Committee on Women's Concerns is exploring ways to pull together a comprehensive annotated bibliography of publications of interest to Mennonite and Brethren in Christ women. This might include listings of books on women in the church, women and peace-making, women and poverty, Mennonite women's published fiction and poetry, etc., as well as a compilation of titles of dissertation projects by Mennonite and Brethren in Christ women. This might be a student project or a project of interest to a woman planning a sabbatical leave. Sections of the project might be done by different women.

If you are interested in this project, have ideas for how to get it done, or know of existing studies/listings, please contact Tina Mast Burnett, Report editor, Box 500, Akron, PA 17501; telephone 717-859-3889; fax 717-859-3875.



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